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ABSTRACT

Collaboration between secondary and post secondary schools can provide systematic, recursive assessment models that will benefit students, inform teachers, strengthen institutions, and add to the knowledge base regarding career development. This document outlines the framework used for the Academic Studies and Career Planning (ASCP) class at Valencia High School. The class is made up of seven units: Study Skills; Exploring Career Possibilities; Tech Lab Modules; Business Skills; A Day on the Job; Confident Speaking; and Can You Make Ends Meet. This program addresses many concerns in the culmination of the K-12 educational enterprise. In particular, ASCP delivers the foundation of readiness of students for making a choice between being career-bound or college-bound students. It delivers job readiness skills to all students, regardless of whether they intend to pursue work or higher education after high school. In essence, the program leverages advantage by treating all students alike. ASCP also exposes children of low-skilled occupations to a diverse cluster of high skilled occupations in the technology lab. The class functions as an extended orientation that assists students with the transition to high school. Furthermore, disenfranchised students are given a uniform message about the role of education in shaping one's future. The mission and philosophy of ASCP is to help students think differently about their career and educational choices. (MKA)

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Leveraging Advantage: Career Education Strategies for Disenfranchised Students

by

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Leveraging Advantage: Career Education Strategies for Disenfranchised Students

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Overview

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 (STWOA) has created interest in assuring that high school students are properly prepared for emancipation. Collaboration between secondary and post-secondary schools can provide systematic, recursive assessment models that will benefit students, inform teachers, strengthen institutions, and add the knowledge base regarding career development. Outlined in the document is the framework used for the Academic Studies and Career Planning class at Valencia High School, Orange County, California.

Leveraging Advantage

Curricula experiences for students from kindergarten to graduate school provide educators, researchers, administrators, and evaluators with an endless source of material for controversy and compromise. Institutional attempts to design educational experiences that are cutting edge are criticized just as often as experiences that follow a traditional approach. Current policy initiatives that focus on the "school-to-work" transition for adolescents have contributed to both focus and ambiguity in the area of curricula design.

Compounding the problem of articulating the boundary between class and career is the fact that in large population centers many students are disenfranchised by virtue of language, skin color, citizenship status, etc. This article discusses pedagogical strategies for providing focus and clarity to disenfranchised students as they navigate this boundary landscape. This paper describes how one secondary school (grades 9 to 12) addressed the issues of providing career education services in such a diverse setting.

School-To-Work Issues

The counseling and guidance movement was born at the turn of the century as Frank Parsons sought to help individuals discover how their personal traits matched factors in different occupational settings (Parsons, 1909). This mission has been part of guidance in the United States for more than a century. Still, over half of the graduates of secondary schools do not have the basic skills necessary to apply for an entry-level job. Almost one-quarter of liberal arts graduates from four-year colleges find it necessary to return to community colleges to acquire such skills (Vo, 1997).

The impending transition of the high school student to the world of work has been an increasingly important, if not central focus of secondary education for the past half century (Becker, 1964). Intriguingly, while this serves as the major focus for secondary education in most Western industrialized nations, the United States did not address the issue as a matter of public policy until the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) of 1994 (Lewis, Stone, Shipley & Madzar, 1998). Since that time, STWOA has been driven much in the way of funding, policy, and pedagogy in American secondary schools.

Ample literature suggests that attempts to separate college-bound and non-college-bound students into separate tracks have met with outcomes that seldom meet the needs of both sets of students (Steel, 1991; D'Amico, 1984; Steinberg, et. al., 1981). In fact, Finn (1986) has argued that the marginalized nature of adolescent employment provides the teenager with little influence when entering the job market. Non-college-bound workers often linger in these dead end jobs for four to five years after high school graduation. Ultimately, they enter the "true workforce" about the same time as their college-educated counterparts and many return to college in their late twenties. For Finn, this is a reason to maintain the same career development curriculum for all students...regardless of their stated intentions to go to college. While STWOA has meant increased vocational education in some school districts, for others it has been translated as the education of those at the margins of society.

It would appear that career education is best framed by a desire to teach all adolescents about the world of work. The agenda for such courses is to insure that early in their high school careers, students learn what possibilities exist beyond the "college/not college" views of adulthood. Such programs can foster career exploration and career maturity that match Super's understanding of career development (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1994).

History of the Academic Skills and Career Planning Program

The Setting

Valencia High School (VHS) in Orange County, California is a paradigm of the above-described issues. Established in 1933, VHS is a four-year high school (grades 9 - 12) serving a very diverse population area and is one of four high schools in the Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District. There are approximately 1800 students who represent the entire socioeconomic spectrum from working class to upper class. For the past twenty years, the ethnic makeup of VHS has been in transition. In the late 1980's White and Latino students were about equal in number and accounted for 80% of the student population. By the middle of the 1990's, a gradual trend had increased Latino numbers by about 10%, while the number of White students decreased by the same amount. The net effect has been that VHS now serves a largely ethnic minority student body (approximately 65%) and must contend with 28 different languages spoken in the homes. Further complicating matters is the fact that a sizable portion (approximately 40%) of the student body receives some public assistance in the form of AFDC or subsidize school lunches. This would indicate that these students come from families who struggle at the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder.

Program History

At the beginning of the 1994 academic year, the decision was made to implement a schoolwide "career exploration" program. Prior to this time there had been no methodical career development initiative at VHS. Additionally, it was determined that student exposure to

technology would be a vital ingredient of this program. Again, there had been no school wide attempt to integrate technology use on the part of students. The primary challenge was how to develop a curricular package that could address these issues with the large numbers of students from working class and disadvantaged homes.

Orange County is a largely white (approximately 72%) suburban county that is marked by affluence and upwardly mobile communities. As a result, few models existed to serve a highly diverse, disadvantage community. Two programs existed that linked career-bound students with community partners to help them develop a portfolio of experiences to jumpstart their careers after high school. These programs, however, were from very affluent districts, in which most families have the resources to support either career-bound or college-bound students in their transitions. Additionally, these programs were supported by well-funded on-campus career centers. Volunteer parent workers with college degrees often staffed these career centers. Finally, these programs did not have the significant numbers of second-language students. While the models they provided were inappropriate for VHS in some ways, both were driven by a model that produced an "experience" portfolio for some of their students. The VHS approach would be to develop an experience portfolio for <u>all</u> students.

In the spring of 1995, two sections of the Academic Skills and Career Planning Class (ASCP) were piloted at VHS. By the fall of 1995, seven sections were offered. In the Fall of 1996, all students in all District high schools were required to complete ASCP prior to graduation. The ASCP experience provides first year high school students with a matrix for making choices throughout their high school career. Because the program is mandatory for all students, it does not become simply tutoring for non-college leaning students. Collaboration with a local university has created a program in which external feedback and action research are sources of enrichment for students and faculty at both institutions.

Action Research As A Tool

Action research has been a mainstay of investigative activities for colleges and universities for the past two decades. Additionally, action research has provided the primary means of collaboration between higher education and teachers in K12 settings for an even longer period (Bickel & Hattrup, 1995). The premise of action research is founded in the belief that "real problems" provide the most fertile ground for examining and understanding both broad and categorical phenomena in education. Priorities for affective action research include the notion that action research is at its best when it is performing to give the teacher information about his or her classroom. Focussed in this way, action research translated directly into more effective pedagogy. Methodologies that are developed by one entity (usually the university) and are directed at another entity (usually the school) will provide one-sided results at best. Finally, action research is a tool that is reflective and recursive (Henderson, Hunt, & Webster, 1995). Research programs that address realistic, human issues can not be performed as "quick, one-shot surveys." They depend on input from various institutional and community stakeholders. Chataway (1997) suggests that the foundation of action research be based in its participatory nature. The partnership between researchers, institutions, and stakeholders assures that the research will remain both practical and flexible.

Given these recommendations from the literature, the ASCP class at Valencia has also become a site for on-going action research. University-focused research in the career development of adolescents support outcome research for the high schools on-going accreditation and curricular improvement.

General Program Description

The ASCP experience is required of all incoming students. The majority of these students are freshman coming from district middle schools. Transfer students from other districts are required to complete ASCP as well. Transfer students from high schools within the district have typically completed the ASCP experience at their other high school. While it is acknowledged that students other than freshman are in the class, the philosophy of the class is built around the assumption that most ASCP students will be freshmen. ASCP is a one-semester course. Freshmen enroll in ASCP in either fall or spring, rotating the class with a required freshman "Health" class.

Program Components

Students enrolled in ASCP are expected to complete seven units during the semester-long class. Each unit lasts between 10 and 15 days, with some units overlapping others during the semester. The units include Study Skills, Exploring Career Possibilities, Tech Lab Modules, Business Skills, A Day on the Job, Confident Speaking, and Making Ends Meet (See Table 1). ASCP is modified somewhat in two "sheltered" classes for second language speakers and for students with an active Individualized Education Plan.

Table 1. ASCP Study Units

Unit #1	Study Skills	Tips on studying, note taking, test taking, etc. for success in high school and beyond.
Unit #2	Exploring Career Possibilities	Assess personal interests and skills (CAPS, COPS, COPES, and VIAS). Research on the school's computers six careers using the results of the above assessments.
Unit #3	Tech Lab Modules	Three times during the semester, students will work at a different station to investigate various career options.
Unit #4	Business Skills	Focus on resumes, cover letters, interviews, thank-you notes, etc.
Unit #5	"A Day on the Job"	Research the career option the student is most interested in and shadow a person working in that area. Prepare a rough draft of the report and then keystroke and edit the final draft.
Unit #6	Confident Speaking	Present to the class what was learned about career of choice.
Unit #7	"Can You Make Ends Meet?"	Helps determine whether or not your career of choice will enable you to live your lifestyle of choice.

Generally speaking, the units can be divided into two categories. These categories would be Exploring (units 2, 3, 5, & 7) and Exercising (units 1, 4, & 6). Following is a discussion of each category and the interventions used in each unit.

Exploring

Super's initial conceptualization of career development suggested that the ages from 15 to 24 are most aptly designated as the "Exploration" stage (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1995). The individual is seen at the cusp of being able to translate his or her self-concept into general occupational term. The primary task of this stage is to identify as many appropriate fields and levels of work as possible. Criticisms of Super's early work, however, are clear. While middle class males have support and role models to assist in this exploration, women and working class males lack these environmental supports. The purpose of the ASCP "exploring" units is to help all students, but especially disadvantaged students, as they move through the process of exploration.

Unit #2, Exploring Career Possibilities

Early in the semester, all freshman men and women take the CAPS (Career Ability Placement Survey), COPS (Interest Inventory), and the COPES (Career Orientation Placement and Evaluation Survey (measures personal values). The results of the CAPS/COPS/COPES battery is the focus of several weeks of activity researching and "testing" different career fields. Student interest in various fields is researched through the computer lab located in the ASCP classroom. The lab includes various database programs that give brief occupational descriptions, as well as Internet access that allows students to search more broadly for career-based resources. These research results are tied in with both the "Day on the Job" unit and the "Confident Speaking" unit discussed below.

While the COPS system is normed for and directed at junior and senior high students, the ASCP challenge has been for students to think about career in a different way. This philosophy is carried through with the use of the COP system. When students complete their assessment they are asked to write down the "top three" career fields indicated by the inventories. They are also asked to write down three career fields that interest them that are not suggested by the assessment results. The purpose of this directive is dual. First, it continues the precept of career thinking "out of the box." Second, it addresses issues of malingering during the assessment. Students who chose a "less responsible" approach to the COPS instruments will still have the option to research careers that are of genuine interest to them. Both the COPS system's formal results and the student's informal choices become the initial foundation of the student's ASCP portfolio.

Unit #3, Tech Lab Modules

The ASCP classroom is amply supplied with technology-based career experience stations. (See Table 2) Sixteen stations provide students with hands-on mini-experiences in occupations from satellite technician to radio broadcaster. Most stations have been donated by local business and industry partners and are similar to programs and technology that they use to train employees. Some of these stations are as commonplace as personal computers used to expose students to basic productivity software. Other stations are more unusual. For instance, the ASCP classroom boasts a small scale, but fully functional wind tunnel. Students may use the wind tunnel to test the aerodynamics of wing designs or any other "object of curiosity."

The ASCP staff pays particular attention to the choices made by students. Women are encouraged to "test" stations seen as representing traditionally "male jobs," while men are encouraged to test "female jobs." Additionally, students who have had little exposure to

information technology and who do not have a personal computer at home are encouraged to break down resistance to these technologies by using these stations during the class.

Students are required to "test" three stations during the semester. Many students do more than three and sample broadly across all of the domains of the stations. The only requirement to use a station is that the student will write a brief summary of his or her experience on the station for the ASCP portfolio.

Table 2

Station #1, Information Technology Internet software	Station #2, Computer Applications Productivity software
Station # 3, Computer Aided Drafting CAD/CAM software	Station #4, Robotics Robotic "arm" programming
Station #5, Biotechnology Computer simulation	Station #6, Manual drafting Traditional "mechanical" drawing
Station #7, Satellite Communications Computer/mechanical simulation	Station #8, Computer repair Basic component installation
Station #9, Telecommunications Computer/mechanical simulation	Station #10, Environmental Technology Computer/mechanical simulation
Station #11, Aerodynamics Small scale wind tunnel	Station #12, Waste water management Waste treatment simulation
Station #13, Structural technology Stress testing press	Station #14, Solar energy Active & passive solar technology
Station #15, Electricity & Electronics Circuit design simulation	Station #16, Broadcast occupations Television & radio production

Unit #5, A Day on the Job

Students are encouraged through the first half of the semester to refine and narrow their choice of career. This is done through researching the career option in the library and on the Internet. The student is asked to decide what career is most interesting at this time. While encouraging the student to leave doors to other options open, the student is asked to contact a person in that profession and "shadow" him or her for a day. The student then prepares a report on his or her impressions of what it is like to be an active member of their chosen profession. On occasion these shadowing experiences have convinced students that an unexpected career might be right for them. On occasion, students have experiences that lead them to explore other avenues. ASCP instructors validate either outcome and encourage students to continue to pursue such "shadowing" experience after they complete the class. Their paper entitled "My Day on the Job" becomes part of the ASCP portfolio.

Because many of the school's working class students do not know anyone in various professional fields, the ASCP instructors have developed a cadre of professionals and skilled crafts-persons who serve as volunteers. These individuals are drawn from the local community and are often graduates of the high school themselves. Over the first five years of the program, the corps of volunteers has steadily grown, with many mentors referring colleagues to the program.

Unit #7, Can You Make Ends Meet?

In most ways, this short unit is an attempt to ground students in the reality of various occupational choices. Included are exercises that have students explore realistically the monthly cost of housing, food, utilities, transportation, etc. One ASCP instructor refers to this unit as "reality check day." Particular sensitivity and caution are used in delivering this unit, as it can be a source of embarrassment for some students. Notwithstanding these concerns, the unit is considered an essential piece of helping students understand how career choice affects lifestyle.

Exercising

Unit # 1, Study Skills

Understanding that successful transition to career from high school is founded on the successful transition to high school, the ASCP faculty begins each semester with a thorough study skills curriculum. The study skills component includes training in how to take effective notes in class, time management, how to participate in class, and how to physically prepare (proper rest and nutrition) to study. Students are even given a "guided tour" of a textbook to show them how to properly use the table of contents, the index, and chapter summaries or chapter reviews. Throughout the remainder of the semester, students are asked to "exercise" these study skills in the ASCP class as a means of reinforcing the techniques.

Also during this time, students complete two self-assessments of their "learning style." These informal assessments give students a chance to explore whether their strengths are learning intellectually or intuitively, concretely or abstractly, and analytically or creatively. Additionally, students discuss visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities of learning. They are given several strategies for each modality along with a number of general mnemonic strategies.

Unit #4, Business Skills

Periodically throughout the semester, students are asked to produce a resume and various business letters to fictional prospective employers. Students complete job applications for a variety of different types of jobs. The applications, provided by local businesses and companies, are then peer reviewed and attempted again. The "best" applications are included as a part of the portfolio. Students who are applying for jobs after school are encouraged to bring in those applications and complete them in the class.

An important part of developing these skills centers on helping students prepare for interviews in the workplace. Initially, students go over sample interview questions and work in small peer groups asking and responding to the sample questions. Discussions in class center on such issues as appropriate attire, the difference between being interviewed by a manager and a human resources person, and proper interview etiquette.

This unit culminates with "Dress for Success Day." On this day, the student must wear "appropriate" business style clothes all day at school. Students are required to obtain the signatures of teachers during all six periods of the day. A mock interview is held during the ASCP class and peers and the instructor evaluate the student. He or she is then given feedback about strengths and limitations during the interview process. This feedback is included in the ASCP portfolio.

Unit # 6, Confident Speaking

Each student is asked to prepare a short written and oral presentation that focuses on what he or she learned about the career of choice. Included in the presentation are a discussion of assessment results, experiences in the technology lab modules, and the Day on the Job experience. For the oral presentation, students are expected to dress appropriately as they did for the "Dress for Success" day. The written presentation serves as the capstone for the ASCP portfolio.

Summary

The ASCP program at Valencia High School is a pivotal program that addresses many concerns in the culmination of the K12 educational enterprise. In particular, ASCP delivers the foundation of readiness of students for making a choice between being career-bound or college-bound students. More appropriately, ASCP delivers job readiness skills to all students, whether or not they intend to pursue work or higher education after high school. In essence, the program leverages advantage by treating all students alike. The program is designed to put traditionally college bound and traditionally career bound students in an environment that has them perform the same tasks with the same goals and expectations. This avoids the early "double-tracking" that occurs as students with resources are identified as college-bound and working class students are deemed headed for work (Oakes, 1992). Further, it keeps the ASCP program from becoming a form of "vocational education" that would be more likely to draw negative parent attention (Vo, 1997).

A second positive of the ASCP program is the degree to which the technology lab modules expose sons and daughters of "low-skilled" occupations to a diverse cluster of "high-skilled" occupations. This means that these students will have training experiences (no matter how brief) only 1.5% to 4% of the workforce receive before age 25 (Lynch, 1993). This reinforces the notion above that high school graduates without adequate preparation to apply for jobs will spend four to five years in the workforce without any advancement.

In addition to being a universal experience for entering freshmen, the ASCP class functions much like an extended orientation. The transition to an 1800+ student setting can be difficult for students whose parents never completed a high school experience. Attempts are made by ASCP to link students to their counselors and explain their role in helping them put together a coherent high school plan. In this way, ASCP functions as an "induction" experience for all freshmen. Additionally, ASCP is one of the few academic classes in which high achieving students are not routinely sifted from students with difficulties in achievement and motivation.

Clearly, the ASCP program "levels the field" for disenfranchised students by given a uniform message about the role of education in shaping one's future. Some difficulties remain. While sheltered classes have been instituted for ESL students, these students are almost uniformly Latino. It is not always possible to provide appropriate support to students who come from families who speak one of the other 26 languages represented at VHS. While this is not an uncommon problem in large suburban high schools, it remains a concern.

The mission and philosophy of ASCP is to help students think differently about their career and educational choices. The fact remains, however, that it is "front-loaded." This means that as students get closer and closer to emancipation from the K12 system, they are farther and

farther from the ASCP. VHS has begun to address this problem with the re-establishment of a free-standing career center and the institution of regular "workshops" in conjunction with the counseling staff and their higher education partner. This would serve to continue the experience across the lifespan of the VHS student.

Finally, as with any program, longevity begets institutionalization. Some aspects of the program that were important and relevant five years ago, have become less meaningful as the demographics at VHS and the surrounding community have changed. The primary role of the partnership with higher education has been to function as an outside consultant and action researcher to address issues from a different, less institutional perspective. This partnership should lead to concrete outcome findings, improvements in curriculum delivery, and an enhanced view of the transition from school-to-work or school-to-college.

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